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Assessment in the Arts





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Throughout California the visual and performing arts content standards provide teachers, administrators, students, and the community with a clear set of expectations as to what students should know and be able to perform in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts in elementary school, middle school, and high school.

Purpose of Student Assessment

Assessment of student work in the arts helps teachers determine how they should adapt their instruction so that their students can achieve the content standards. It also helps teachers build a profile for each student that can be used to communicate progress. At the school district level, the assessment data help administrators make effective decisions about instruction, personnel, and resources for the arts education program.

Assessment and instruction should be aligned within the curriculum. The key to using assessment effectively and efficiently is to recognize that, above all, no single assessment tool meets all assessment needs. Assessment can be used to inform instruction, monitor student progress, provide feedback to students and parents, summarize students' learning over a given period of time, and provide additional information to qualify students for special programs.

Assessment of student work in the arts may be accomplished through thoughtfully designed performances, critiques, and analyses, just as artists are constantly assessing their own performances and products and asking others to assess or critique their work. If the visual and performing arts curriculum and instructional materials fully integrate assessment, most assessment activities, especially the monitoring of progress, will contribute to learning and maximize instructional time.

Wolf and Pistone enumerate five assumptions about the efficacy of assessment in the arts. First, students and teachers insist on excellence as exhibited in performances and portfolios. High standards having been set, studio and classroom discussions involve ways to reach those standards. Second, much discussion takes place about judgment—opinions on a range of qualitative issues—and decisions based on insight, reason, and craft. Third, self-assessment is important for all artists. That is, students need to learn how to understand and appraise their own work and that of their peers and other artists. Fourth, varied forms of assessment must be used to obtain information about individual and

group performances. And fifth, ongoing assessment allows students to reflect on their own creations and use the insight gained to enrich their work. When viewed in that way, assessment is an episode of learning.¹ (See “Selected References and Resources” at the back of this publication for additional resources on assessment.)

Types of Assessment

Regular assessment of student progress in mastering grade-level standards is essential to the success of an instructional program based on the visual and performing arts content standards and framework. It should be informative and timely and contribute appropriately to student learning and development. The three types of student assessment are described as follows:

- *Entry-level assessment.* Do students possess crucial prerequisite skills and knowledge? Do they already know some of the material being taught? If so, the teacher can more easily determine the most efficient starting point for learning. Some entry-level assessments should measure mastery of foundational standards; others should measure the degree to which students have mastered some portion of what is to be learned next. Teachers should use the information from the entry-level assessment to ensure that students receive support in specific areas. Entry-level assessments might consist of vocabulary pretests, open-ended conceptual questions, performance opportunities for students to show current mastery of theory or technique, or opportunities to demonstrate current level of skill by using a set of material or prompts.
- *Progress monitoring.* Are students progressing adequately toward achieving standards? Monitoring, which should occur regularly, helps guide instruction in the right direction. In standards-based classrooms monitoring becomes a crucial component of instruction for every student. It signals when alternative routes need to be taken or when students need to review material before moving forward. Only through such monitoring can teachers focus instruction continually so that all students are constantly progressing.

Everything students do during instruction provides opportunities for monitoring. Ongoing assessment allows student artists to reflect on their own creations, using the insights gained to enrich their own work. They need to learn how to appraise their own work and that of peers and professional artists. Therefore, monitoring, whether internal or external, should reflect the essential nature of the knowledge or skill being assessed, direct student learning, and establish expectations for achievement.

¹ Dennie Palmer Wolf and Nancy Pistone, *Taking Full Measure: Rethinking Assessment Through the Arts*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1991.

Internal monitoring (self-assessment) helps students determine their level of mastery according to a set of clear criteria. External monitoring helps teachers, also using a set of clear criteria, determine the students' level of mastery. External monitoring should (1) document performance; (2) help teachers make instructional decisions and adjustments according to documented performance; (3) identify student performance in relationship to the standards; and (4) include a variety of strategies to determine students' level of knowledge and skills.

Monitoring of progress in the arts may also be formal or informal. Formal monitoring might appear as questions or prompts to be answered by students or the performance of a prescribed set of skills on demand. Informal monitoring might include a conference or conversational analysis centered on a work in progress and determination of the next steps needed for completion.

- *Summative evaluation.* Have students achieved the goals defined by a given standard or group of standards? Summative evaluation helps determine whether students have achieved the goals defined in a standard or group of standards. It answers the following questions: Do students know and understand the material? Can they apply the material in another situation? Are they ready to move on? Typically, this type of assessment comes at the end of an instructional unit or school year. The most important aspect of summative evaluation is that it measures the students' long-term growth and mastery of grade-level standards.

Considerations in Arts Assessment

The visual and performing arts content standards focus on developing the knowledge and skills required to create successful artwork and performances. They also include the study of the arts and artists and their influence on culture. Comprehensive assessment relies on a variety of means to create a complete evaluation of students' progress. Assessments include student works of art and performances, open-ended projects or questions, research assignments, constructed response items, or multiple-choice items.

Scoring Rubrics

Whenever a performance assessment tool is used, explicit criteria for evaluating students' work should be determined and shared with the students before the evaluation occurs. Because the arts encourage enthusiasm or novelty, students enjoy a variety of ways to solve artistic problems. Therefore, an assignment or performance task may produce a result far different from what was envisioned yet meet the stated criteria for assessment. Students can express their

creativity fully according to the accepted criteria when they and their parents or guardians are familiar with the criteria and scoring rubrics that teachers use to identify the students' levels of success in meeting the content standards. To help students focus on their work, teachers may attach to assignments or performance tasks sample scoring rubrics describing levels of accomplishment.

Assessment of Performances and Exhibitions

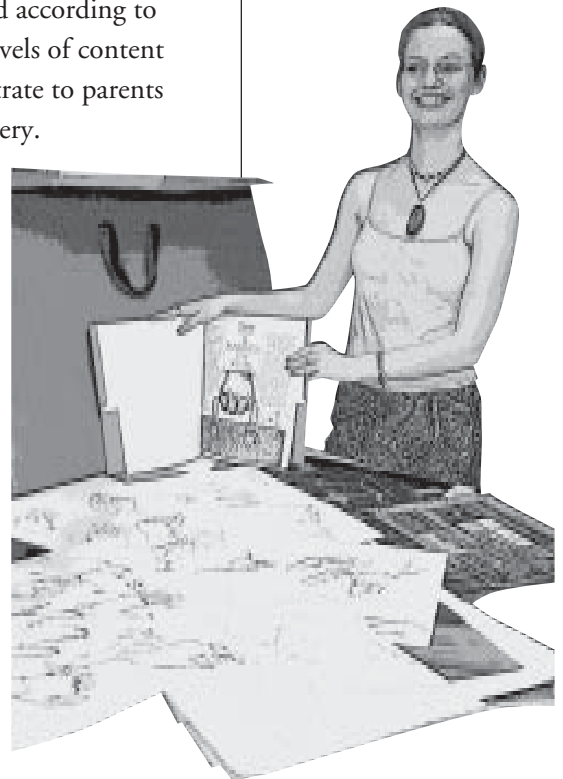
Student performances and exhibitions can lend themselves to formal or informal assessment. Through careful planning the teacher may allow beginning performances to be shared and critiqued to help students gain mastery of the skills being developed. Such a supportive and creative environment helps students build confidence. To satisfy the entrance requirements of the University of California and California State University systems, performance course criteria should include appropriate cocurricular work, such as performances and exhibitions. Teachers should encourage students to make presentations at school board and parent meetings.

Student Portfolios

One way to assess student learning is to examine collections of students' work. Student artists should maintain portfolios of formal and informal work to monitor progress and display the depth and breadth of their skills over time, as do professional artists. Portfolios help students observe improvement in their work and assist teachers in evaluating student progress and the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. When the portfolios have been reviewed according to predetermined criteria, teachers and students can establish the levels of content mastery already achieved. Portfolios can also be used to demonstrate to parents how far students have advanced toward the goal of content mastery.

Assessment portfolios might include examples of draft sketches, technique development, and finished work as well as documentation of artwork or performances, including photographs, audios, videos, digitally formatted compilations, and reflective writings. Some types of such portfolios are as follows:

- *Process portfolios.* These portfolios demonstrate student mastery over time. They may include rough sketches or drafts, preliminary plans for staging, scores or scripts, choreography notes and diagrams, and more refined and finished works. In addition, they may contain written reflections on works in progress, the process for completing the work, influences on the work, and critiques of self and peers. During the course teachers and students



should discuss the work periodically to determine progress and areas needing improvement.

- *Portfolios of assessment tasks.* These portfolios include a series of specific tasks or assignments usually related to the mastery of a set of specific content standards in each of the strands. A middle school portfolio of the assessment tasks has been developed by the California Art Education Association: In task one students compare and contrast two works of portrait art; in task two they create self-portraits; and in task three they use a scoring rubric to evaluate their own artwork.
- *Best-work portfolios.* These portfolios are intended to showcase the best work students have completed in a course. Usually selected jointly by students and teachers, they are typically used in formal and informal reviews of student progress.
- *Competition or high-stakes portfolios.* Portfolios of this type are developed by students for competitions, applications for advanced study, or admission to special programs. Works included should be of the highest quality and demonstrate advanced technical skills and conceptual awareness. Further, they should show evidence of accomplishment in a variety of media, including reflective statements written by the students regarding their work.

Ensemble Assessment

Ensemble products provide a different set of challenges and opportunities. The members of an orchestra, the dancers in a troupe, the actors in a play, and the singers in a quartet all need their own clear assessment criteria because the role of the individual student, whether as a soloist or as a member of the group, is vital to the overall success of the ensemble. That factor should be part of the assessment of a student's progress.

New Media and Electronic Technology

Using new media and electronic technologies for assessment is increasingly valuable to visual and performing arts educators and students. To deliver constructed response items, a school or school district may select exemplary work by teachers who are artists or by students to be digitally photographed or recorded. For example, virtual-reality software facilitates a 360-degree view of an object or performance by a simple command on the computer. Once burned onto a CD, the items may be used by the entire school or school district as part of an assessment.

In any arts discipline portfolios of student work can be burned onto a CD or DVD, stored, and shared with others for assessment. Students may send their portfolios to colleges or universities for entrance into a program or use them to apply for employment. In creating portfolios, students develop

Multiple Measures of Student Progress in the Arts



Selected response items: Multiple choice, true-false, matching, enhanced choice

Brief constructed responses: Fill in the blanks (words, phrases); write short answers (sentences, paragraphs); label a diagram or visual representation (Web, concept map, flowchart, graph or table, illustration).

Products: Produce an essay, a research paper, a log or journal, a report, a story or play, an exhibit, a project, artwork, a model, a dance, a video or audiotape, or a portfolio.

Performances: Make an oral presentation; dance; sing or play an instrument; offer a demonstration, dramatic reading, enactment, debate, recital; teach a lesson.

Process-focused: Perform oral questioning, an observation, an interview, a conference, a process description or demonstration; think aloud; write a learning log.

—Adapted from Ferrara and McTighe,
Assessing Learning in the Classroom

skills in critiquing their own work, a sense of accomplishment, marketable technology skills, insight into their body of work, and a portable record of that work. Students who are performance artists will find videos, CDs, or DVDs especially valuable in documenting and critiquing their work.

An electronic process for assessing student work and providing professional development for arts teachers involves a Web site with an interactive digital interface. In this process teachers first upload a standards-based assessment task with an accompanying scoring rubric and then add examples of student work so that other teachers can evaluate to what extent that work meets the criteria on the scoring rubric. To provide observations and comments, teachers from different schools and school districts may have access to the site. The multiple reviews of the work provide insights and establish anchor or benchmark performances for the task.

Arts Assessment: From the Classroom to the School District

Assessment data help schools and school districts to be accountable for the quality of standards-based arts education programs. A school district moving

toward establishing districtwide assessment in the arts might first conduct an arts program assessment to determine the extent to which the arts are taught at each school level. Then the district might consider what students need to know to attain the visual and performing arts standards and how to report their progress. As school districts move toward student assessment in the arts and share their processes and results, arts education programs throughout the state will be expanded and improved.

Assessment Outside the Classroom

Students can venture outside the classroom to test their knowledge and skills. They can share their works in progress and completed artwork or performances away from the classroom and in doing so gain an invaluable source of new ideas. For example, schoolwide student exhibitions and performances provide a supportive first step in sharing artwork with the community. In time the scope of this sharing can widen to include the school district; the local community; the city, the county, and the state; and national festivals and competitions. But it should be noted that participation in those events is not an end in itself but an integral part of a larger learning objective.

Participation in festivals, competitions, and public exhibitions provides opportunities for the assessment of individuals and ensembles. In those educational events experienced adjudicators provide constructive feedback to teachers and their students and valuable insight that reinforces and extends classroom learning.

Teachers must balance opportunities to share student work and students' need for practicing their skills without having to provide entertainment at events, assemblies, meetings, clubs, and conferences. Although the visibility and popularity of student performing groups can build widespread support for arts programs, those activities should not interfere with the students' overall education.

Advanced placement (AP) courses also provide opportunities for students to challenge the depth of their understanding of the conceptual and historical arts nationally. Rankings from AP examinations can benefit a student's placement in college and chances of winning scholarships and grant entitlements. International baccalaureate programs provide a standardized program that focuses on critical thinking and exposure to a variety of points of view and is designed to encourage intercultural understanding by young people. (More information can be found online at <http://www.ibo.org>.)

Arts Assessment in California

The California arts education community has been exploring the assessment of student work in the arts for many years. For that purpose the Towards Arts Assessment Project of the California Department of Education and the

Sacramento County Office of Education has issued *Prelude to Performance Assessment in the Arts*.² Assessment projects have also been initiated by the following organizations:

- The California Arts Project (TCAP) is attempting to involve more teachers in multiple measures of arts assessment.
- The California professional arts teacher associations provide resources on arts assessment.
- The California Art Education Association (CAEA) has published two documents on portfolio assessment in the visual arts.
- The California Music Educators Association (CMEA) offers publications on assessing students in music and sponsors regional and state-wide-adjudicated festivals and competitions.
- The California Dance Educators Association (CDEA) and the California Educational Theatre Association (CETA) also provide information in their publications and at annual conferences offer professional development in assessing student work.
- CETA and CAEA also offer students opportunities to participate in adjudicated festivals, competitions, and shows.

In 1998 the California Department of Education initiated the California Arts Assessment Network (CAAN) to assist school districts in developing and piloting appropriate assessment of student work in the arts at the school district level. The network activities include a project with *TeachingArts.org*, the California online arts resource center, to evaluate student work interactively online. CAAN is also collaborating with a variety of educational agencies in other states to develop an online pool of assessment items.

Arts Assessment Nationally

In 1997 the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) developed assessment tools and items for grades four, eight, and twelve in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), administered to eighth-grade students throughout the nation, measured students' knowledge and skills only in music, theatre, and the visual arts. Although an assessment was developed for dance, it was not administered because of the lack of a suitable national sample. The next arts assessment will be administered in 2008. Further information is available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/arts/> or from the NAGB at 800 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 825, Washington, DC 20002-4233.

² *Prelude to Performance Assessment in the Arts: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1994.